

What Is the School Doing to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse?

Isn't it getting hard to turn on the television and not be bombarded with it? It seems like child sexual abuse is being talked about all over the place! It is parents' worst nightmare. What are we doing to prevent the scandal of child sexual abuse within our schools?

The Auburn School District counselors have been teaching child sexual abuse prevention lessons on a regular basis for about fifteen years. Students in kindergarten, second and fourth grades receive yearly instruction on how to stay safe.

This is an important part of any child's education. Some parents fear that the lessons will make their children afraid, but the unknown is usually more frightening to children than the known. Safety lessons on touching are no more likely to produce fears about touching than a traffic safety curriculum are likely to make kids have an extreme fear of cars! A healthy respect and understanding of appropriate touching is healthy and wise, since parents cannot be with school age children at all times.

As counselors, we also emphasize the importance of good, nurturing touch, like that between children and parents. We explain that it is never okay for someone to touch a private part of your body, except for a health or hygiene reason. It has been my experience that children are able to make these distinctions easily. Children seem to have the most difficulty understanding that hitting touches, although they feel bad, are not the same as sexual abuse. Since we describe private parts as the area of your body covered by your swimming suit, students sometimes confuse someone "bumping" into their bottom or accidentally touching their chest as abuse. The good news, however, is that students are telling us if these touches occur so we can provide more information.

All educators are legally obligated to report to the authorities if it is believed that a student may have been sexually abused. Teachers usually report their concerns to the school counselor. As counselors, we usually talk to the student to obtain the information we need to make a referral. If the alleged abuser is someone the student has regular contact with, we usually call the police, who can take immediate action. All allegations are also reported to Child Protective Services (CPS).

It is important to realize that the counselor and the school do not investigate the sexual abuse allegations. It is essential that police and CPS conduct the investigation, since they have access to all the information and have been trained to conduct a legal investigation. In some situations, the school is not able to reveal information to parents while an investigation is being completed, in order to assure the safety of the child.

In order to assure your child's safety while they are at school, every adult who has access to children is pre-screened by the Washington State Patrol.

Any report of alleged sexual misconduct or abuse by someone in school would be immediately reported to a district administrator for a full investigation. Concerns would also be reported to CPS and the police.

Your child's safety has been our concern for a long time. If you would like more information about the personal safety curriculum we use, please feel free to call us.

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